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Q6(b)

## Elucidate the difference between secularism, religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and spiritualism from an anthropological perspective.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

### Core demand of the question

- Define secularism, religiosity, religious fundamentalism and spiritualism
- Differentiate them with anthropological examples from India and comparative cases
- Avoid sermon and avoid treating secularism as simple irreligion

### Revision summary

Secularism is a political arrangement of religious equality and principled distance, not simple atheism.

Religiosity is lived ritual and shrine practice, as in Srinivas, Vidyarthi and little traditions.

Fundamentalism is a modern, organised claim to purify state and society by one inerrant faith.

Spirituality is extra-institutional or interior sacred seeking; it must not be used to rank tribes below 'philosophy'.

The four can coexist in one biography; they are not stages of evolution.

### Introduction

From an anthropological view these four words name different relations between **people, power and the sacred**. They are not four rungs of one ladder from primitive to modern. Indian fieldwork forces the distinctions because the same person may light a lamp, vote a secular ticket, and reject a call to hate.

### Body

#### Secularism

Secularism is a **political arrangement** of religious plurality. In India it is not the French emptying of the public square. **Nehruvian** practice, **Articles 25-28**, and **S. R. Bommai** treat the state as even-handed among religions, sometimes intervening against social evil (temple entry, triple talaq litigation, personal-law debate). Anthropology (**T. N. Madan**, **Ashis Nandy**, **Rajeev Bhargava** in a neighbouring discipline) notes that Indian secularism is **principled distance**, not the absence of religion. A tribal council that hears a marriage dispute under PESA custom is not a theocracy; a state that funds all pilgrimages unequally is a failed secularism.

## Religiosity

- **Religiosity is lived practice:** ritual frequency, shrine use, fasting, possession, and the everyday sacred. **M. N. Srinivas's** Coorgs, **Vidyarthi's** Gaya **sacred complex**, **Marriott's** little tradition, and **Turner's** pilgrimage are studies of religiosity. A Bhil or Santhal household can be highly religious without being fundamentalist. Religiosity can be inclusive (shared village shrines) or ranked (who may enter the inner room). It is a **dimension of culture**, not a party programme.

## Religious fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is a **modern political project** that claims a purified, inerrant scripture or origin and seeks to discipline state and society by it. It is not "more religiosity". **Marty and Appleby** treated it as a twentieth-century formation. In India it appears as organised communalism, anti-minority mobilisation, and sometimes as scriptural reform inside a community. **G. S. Ghurye** worried about national unity; **Elwin** worried about tribal absorption into a majoritarian sacred. Anthropology (**Tambiah**, **Veena Das** on violence) stresses that fundamentalism needs print, census majorities and youth organisations. A Toda or Apatani ritual revival is usually **ethnic revitalisation**, not fundamentalism, unless it seeks to punish other faiths through the state.

## Spiritualism

Spiritualism in ordinary English can mean séances; in this paper it is better read as **spirituality**: a personal or philosophical quest for meaning, often de-institutionalised (bhakti interiority, some Buddhist modern, New Age, Sufi affect). **Geertz's** mood and motivation, **Marriott's** transaction with deities, and tribal **singbonga** or boonga experience can be spiritual without a church. The risk is elite language that calls Brahmanical philosophy spiritual and tribal ritual superstitious. Anthropology refuses that rank.

## Differences in one view

Secularism regulates **power among religions**. Religiosity is **practice**. Fundamentalism is **authoritarian political religion**. Spiritualism/spirituality is **interior or extra-institutional sacred experience**. A secular state can house intense religiosity. Fundamentalism attacks both liberal secularism and plural religiosity. Spiritual talk can hide from politics or, in **Gandhi's** case, feed a public ethic.

- **Tribal India complicates all four:** **sacred groves** are religiosity and resource management; **conversion** debates test secular law; **Hindutva or missionary fundamentalisms** compete for ST souls; **Elwin's** philosophy valued tribal spiritual worlds without making them a national church.

## Flow diagram

Secularism -> State and plurality  
 Religiosity -> Lived ritual  
 Fundamentalism -> Political purity  
 Spirituality -> Interior meaning

## Conclusion

Secularism is a civic rule of distance and equality. Religiosity is everyday sacred practice. Fundamentalism is a modern project to capture the state for a purified faith. Spirituality is meaning-seeking that may travel light of institutions. Anthropology keeps them apart so that a pilgrim is not named a fundamentalist by default.

## Facts & figures

### Articles 25-28

Freedom of religion and limits on religious instruction in wholly state-funded schools; the constitutional secular cluster.

### Sacred complex

Vidyarthi's model of Gaya as organised religiosity linking specialists, geography and hinterland.

### Bommai 1994

Supreme Court treated secularism as a basic feature and a ground in federal politics.

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